

Provençal Chicken with Rice

2 chicken thighs (bone-in, skin-on)—about 3/4 lb.

Salt & pepper

1/2 T. olive oil

1 t. butter

1/2 a small onion (about 3 oz.), peeled & cut in a small dice

1/2 a large red bell pepper, seeded and cut in 1/2- to 3/4-inch dice (about 2/3 c.)

1 fat clove of garlic, minced

Pinch of saffron, optional

1/2 t. dried oregano

1/4 t. fennel seed, crushed in a mortar and pestle

1/2 c. kalamata olives, halved (about 8 to 10)

1/2 c. basmati rice

3/4 c. low- or no-salt chicken stock/broth

1/4 t. kosher salt

1 T. minced flat leaf parsley

1/4 c. late summer tomato compote (see below), optional

The chicken: If time, salt the chicken the day before. Simply salt and place in a dish, cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate. I used 3/4 t. Morton's kosher salt per pound of chicken—so for 3/4 lb., use a generous 1/2 t. If you don't have time to do this, just salt well right before cooking.

The pan: For this small recipe, you will need an oven-safe pan with a tight fitting lid that has a cooking surface that is about 7 inches in diameter and is about 3 1/2 to 4 inches deep. I have used a small Le Creuset Dutch oven with a cooking surface of 6 inches...and this works, but it is a tight squeeze for the chicken. My 7 inch pan is a typical oven-safe sauce pan (all metal...no plastic or rubber handles/knobs) with a 3 quart capacity. If the pan is much wider than 7 1/2 inches the rice will not cook properly.

Preheat the oven to 375° F.

Season the chicken with pepper (and salt if not pre-salted). Place the pan over a medium-high heat and add the olive oil and butter. When the butter is melted and the foam has subsided, add the chicken to the pan with the skin side down. Cook at an active sizzle (reducing the heat as necessary) until the skin is golden and crisp and the fat is well rendered. Depending on your pan and your stove, this will take 5 to 8 minutes. Reduce the heat to medium low, turn the thighs over and cook for another 3 or 4 minutes. Transfer the chicken to a plate.

Pour off all but a tablespoon of the fat. If the fat is excessively dark or burned, pour it all off and replace it with a tablespoon of butter or olive oil. Add the onions and peppers along with a pinch of salt and cook over moderately low heat until the onions are tender and translucent and the peppers are tender—about 8 minutes. Add the garlic, along with the herbs and spices, and cook for a minute—or until fragrant.

While the chicken and onions are cooking, rinse the rice. Place the rice in a bowl sieve and rinse under cold running water until the water is running clear. Gently shake the sieve to remove as much excess water as you can. Leave the rice in the sieve, sitting over a bowl or other container, until you are ready for it.

When the vegetables, garlic and spices are ready, increase the heat to medium high and add the rice and olives. Cook, stirring and scraping, until the rice is sizzling/hot throughout and looks white/opaque. Add the stock and the salt and bring to a good boil (this should take less than a minute). Place the chicken on top of the rice and put the lid on the pan. Transfer to the oven and bake for 25 minutes. Remove from the oven and check to make sure the chicken is cooked through—it should be over 180°. (It is safe to eat at 160°, but thighs are more tender and moist when they are cooked to at least 180°.) Put the lid back on the pan and let the chicken and rice rest for five minutes.

While the rice rests, heat the tomato compote. You may fold the tomato compote in when you fluff the rice...or dollop it over the plated chicken and rice. Remove the chicken to a plate(s). Fluff the rice, adding the parsley (and compote, if you like) as you do. Taste and season as necessary. Serves 2.

Notes & Variation:

- I love this served with baby spinach (on the side) that has been barely wilted in melted butter (easy to do while the rice rests)...or with blanched and buttered green beans.
- This dish is a close cousin to classic *Arroz con Pollo*. To make *Arroz con Pollo*, add an ounce of diced ham or salami with the garlic (omit the fennel and oregano) and cook til sizzling. Add the tomato compote and saffron. Bring to a simmer. Add the rice—replacing the black olives with half as many green olives—and a half tablespoon of rinsed capers. Scatter a heaped third cup of thawed frozen peas over the rice when you check the temperature of the chicken. Let rest 5 minutes and serve.
- The tomato compote (recipe below) is optional—but if you have some delicious ripe summer tomatoes...or a thick homemade tomato compote in your freezer—it is a nice addition.

Late Summer Tomato Compote:

1 T. olive oil

1 clove of garlic, minced

Pinch of hot pepper flakes

1 small (about 5 oz.) very ripe summer tomato, peeled, cored and roughly diced

Place the oil, along with the garlic and pepper flakes in a small sauté pan and place the pan over moderately high to high heat. When the garlic begins to sizzle enthusiastically and is just on the verge of taking on a bit of color, add the tomatoes (along with all of the juices) to the pan. The tomatoes should immediately begin to simmer rapidly. Allow the tomatoes to cook, shaking the pan back and forth occasionally, stirring at regular intervals and regulating the heat in order to

maintain a brisk simmer, until the tomatoes have broken down and the sauce is very thick (a path will remain when you draw a spoon through the tomatoes) and the oil is just beginning to break out of the sauce. This should only take about 5 minutes. You should have a generous quarter cup. Remove from the heat. Season to taste with salt.

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